# Interview with Robert P. Smith

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. SMITH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: February 28, 1989



*Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you become interested in foreign affairs?*

SMITH: I suppose that goes back to my youth, when I was a young Marine. I enlisted in the Marine Corps right out of high school and served three years, the first time, as an enlisted man.

*Q: Was this during the war?*

SMITH: Just after the end of World War II. I wound up visiting a whole lot of places in the Far East. I was stationed for two years at Subic Bay, the naval operating base in the Philippines. And I guess that's what turned me on to living and working abroad and other cultures and other peoples. And I'd always been interested in government, political science, and history.

So I came back and started college. I went to Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. Fortunately, about halfway through my freshman year they came up with a new inter-disciplinary studies program called International Affairs. That was just what the doctor ordered and I changed my major to that. I must say that I never regretted it. On the other hand, six months later I went back into the Marines because the Korean War broke out. I

did two more years and was commissioned and wound up with the 1st Marine Division in Korea.

*Q: Did you get in the wrong place at the wrong time?*

SMITH: I was not wounded, I'm happy to say. As a Marine second lieutenant, an infantry lieutenant, I'm very glad to have survived that. When I came back, I finished school, but I seemed always to be pointing toward the Foreign Service for some reason. In my junior year I took the written exam, which was awful in those days.

*Q: This was for the Foreign Service?*

SMITH: The Foreign Service.

*Q: This is the three-and-a-half day exam?*

SMITH: Exactly.

*Q: I am also a veteran of that.*

SMITH: I remember having to drive to Dallas and taking that ghastly exam and watching the others in the room. We may have started out with 30 or 40 people. At each break point in those three days, whether it was lunch or the afternoon, five or six would drop out. [Laughs] By the time the last day had rolled around, I knew I had failed because there were whole pages of questions I couldn't answer and I just had to leave them blank. But I stuck to it and managed to pass.

Those were the McCarthy days, of course, so my appointment didn't come through until a year or more later. I managed to stay on and finish my master's degree before I was appointed. And then the old story. Having waited for a year-and-a-half for word to come back to take my oral examination, I flew back to Washington on short notice and did that. Again, I was sure I had failed, but I didn't. I then went back to Fort Worth and within six

weeks I got a frantic telegram or phone call, I've forgotten which, saying, “Can you report next week?”

*Q: Probably it was a telephone call. I got the same thing.*

SMITH: In March of 1955, Eisenhower's first administration, I packed up my wife and moved back to Washington, where the reception was sort of, “What? Are you here already?” I was assigned to the old News Division, run then by Lincoln White, a fabled spokesman and one of my heroes. So instead of going into any kind of training, I went right to work as a press officer.

*Q: You went in in March of 1955 and the first class to be put together was in July of 1955. I know because I was in that class. Before that you were all being used sort of ala infantry replacements.*

SMITH: That's right. That's right.

*Q: The few people that were coming in were just being thrown into the breach.*

SMITH: Right. I was in that job and I loved it. It was a marvelous introduction to the Foreign Service for a young FSO. It was a great assignment. I was there less than two years, about 18 months, I think, before I was assigned abroad. And then I went to some sort of course. Joe Montllor and Jan Nadleman ran it, but it was somewhat abbreviated.

*Q: Yes. They were running the basic officers' training course. I think it was just two months, but those two were running it at that time.*

SMITH: You remember those names?

*Q: Yes.*

SMITH: And then we went off to Lahore, Pakistan, where I was assigned as vice consul and chief of the one-man consular section. I don't know whether you just want a stream of consciousness thing or something else.

*Q: Not really. You can refer back to, maybe, lessons learned, but I would like to concentrate on your African experience here. But before I do that, you served in Lahore as consular officer from 1956 to 1958, and then Beirut from 1959 to 1961.*

SMITH: Right.

*Q: What was your impression of the Foreign Service by that time?*

SMITH: Well, it was very favorable, indeed. I thoroughly enjoyed that first assignment. I continue to believe that every FSO should be assigned, if not on his first assignment, then very early on, to a consular job of some sort. I really think that's part and parcel of the Foreign Service and a terribly important part.

So I enjoyed that first assignment in the consular section. I had everything from passports to visas to protection of American citizens. In fact, I had a young American woman raped who was driving overland from Kabul into Peshawar. She was raped by a Greek driver she had hired in Tehran to drive her on the journey. Incredible. Things that were all good training for what lay ahead. So my reaction to the Foreign Service was very positive, indeed. And it continued.

I went from Lahore, actually, to French language training in Nice for three months, then to Beirut, where I was assigned, initially, as an economic officer. I had had great bosses in Lahore. Both Ernie Fisk and Andy Corry, my consuls general, were regarded as characters in the Foreign Service, but I learned a great deal from them.

Ernie Fisk was an old newspaper man and Andy Corry was really a political appointee. He was a former minerals attach# in New Delhi and a prot#g# of Senator Mike Mansfield

because he was from Montana. And he used to teach the classics at the University of Montana. He was a Ph.D. and very well educated, almost too much so at times because he was given to telling jokes at staff meetings in Latin and not understanding why we weren't all roaring with laughter. But I had good bosses there.

Then in Beirut, initially as economic officer, and then as political officer, under Ambassador Robert McClintock who, again, was one of the outstanding senior officers in the Foreign Service. He was then on his third or fourth ambassadorship. Tough but marvelous to work for. After a year he shifted me to the political section in Beirut which, of course, in that part of the world is fascinating. I enjoyed the work in Beirut enormously. But by this time we had two children, and we didn't really enjoy apartment living in Beirut.

And to be honest, I was not that enamored of the Arab world. Two things happened simultaneously. The Department came out with a notice—this would have been 1961, I suppose—that they were going to mount the African Field Seminar and take a group of young and middle-grade foreign service officers on a six-week tour through Africa, and they were asking for volunteers for this. Simultaneously, the Department asked me if I would like to round trip to Beirut and enter the Arabic studies program, full-time specialization in Arabic. And I did not want Arabic specialization.

*Q: Can I ask what didn't you like about the Arab world? It's an acquired taste.*

SMITH: It is, indeed, and I hate to let my prejudices show. If I'm honest with myself, I suppose I would have to attribute it to prejudice of some sort. We had a number of Lebanese friends, obviously. But I must say, in all honesty, I never made the kind of lasting friendships among my Arab colleagues and friends that I did in virtually every other post in the world, certainly including the African post. I simply didn't enjoy the Middle East.

And the Lebanese, of course, are unique. While their politics may be fascinating, perhaps the Machiavellian aspects of it didn't turn me on too much. I really can't answer that, Stu. I don't know why. It's simply, as you say, an acquired taste that I didn't acquire. Now many

of my friends there did. Dick Murphy was in the Arabic studies program there. We later visited Dick and Ann when they went to Aleppo as vice consul. And we had many friends that remained in the Arabic studies program, but it didn't turn me on.

*Q: You made a conscious decision that this was not for you? I mean, it was offered to you and you said, no.*

SMITH: That's right.

*Q: In 1961 I was in INR dealing with Africa at the time, myself. And this was almost the year of the discovery of Africa.*

SMITH: That's right. Precisely.

The Kennedy Administration was in and this was a place where they felt they could shine. New countries were coming in and we were very excited about Africa.

And I saw, I suppose as a young officer, an opportunity to get in on the ground floor, as it were. And I volunteered for that African Field Seminar and volunteered for African area specialization, which involved not coming back to Beirut, obviously, but rather a year's university work in the United States.

*Q: Did you go on the Seminar?*

SMITH: Yes.

*Q: Could you describe some of the people and the impressions that you all had and any, you might say, lasting effects? This was a unique experience, was it not?*

SMITH: It was a unique experience. I don't know that my group was the first; I think we may have been the second. Our leader was an experienced FSO named Curtis Strong.

We must have had 15, perhaps 20, officers, most of them from State. We had one or two from CIA, DOD, and USIA, and a few others.

We started in in Dakar, spent two weeks at the University of Dakar in Senegal. You had to have French for this, obviously, because you were covering both French and English speaking Africa. We spent two weeks in Dakar at the university. And then, in a chartered old DC-3, we started zig-zagging our way right across Africa—Bamako, Bobo Dioulasso in what was then Upper Volta, Ouagadougou, Bangui, Abidjan, Lagos, Accra, all over the place. And in each place the embassies certainly did their homework. We met, virtually in every place, with the head of state, the prime minister, the foreign minister, and so forth. Plus home entertainment, believe it or not, by Africans, civil servants, professors, or doctors, lawyers, what have you. I found it a very, very exciting trip, indeed. We then continued across Africa, winding up in Nairobi and Kampala, and spending the last two weeks at Makerere College in Uganda with more lectures and so forth, in English this time. It really turned me on. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

The side benefit of that trip was that, while I was on it, it fell to my wife to pack up our household effects and do all the nitty-gritty involving our transfer. And then we came back to the states and I had a great year at Northwestern University in the Africa Studies Program under Professor Melville Herskovits, who was then and perhaps still is, posthumously, the granddaddy of American Africanists/anthropologists. He had done his early field work in Dahomey, now Benin, back in the early 1930s and had written book after book on it. So sitting at his feet for nine months was the opportunity of a lifetime. I didn't go for another master's degree there. I took what I wanted to take and even audited some courses. I was able to really concentrate on Africa. There were three of us assigned to that program. I don't know whether we're still doing that or not.

*Q: I don't either. So some considerable care was taken to get our young officers off to a right start at that time, rather than a haphazard, you drift into it.*

SMITH: Oh, yes.

*Q: Maybe this is, of course, an advantage of when something springs up because our posts were really quite minimal until the independence movement started.*

SMITH: But as you pointed out earlier, this was at the time of the burgeoning of Africa. We were opening up new posts every day, opening new embassies, consulates. And, indeed, my onward assignment from Northwestern couldn't have been a better one.

*Q: Could you describe what that was and when it was?*

SMITH: I finished the academic year 1961-1962 at Northwestern. I'll never forget the phone call from Washington. Nigeria, of course, was the most exciting country in Africa. Even then it was burgeoning. They had an astute prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The President was Nnamdi Azikiwe. Both loomed very large on the African scene. They were both well educated, terribly articulate, bright, I would say brilliant men. And my onward assignment was to open a new consulate in Eastern Nigeria in the provincial capital, Enugu.

*Q: Why did we want to open a consulate there?*

SMITH: In those days there were three major regions in Nigeria, the Northern, the Western, and the Eastern. We wisely, in my judgment, wanted a consulate in each of those three major regions because of the sheer size, and diversity of the country, and the terrible tribal divisions that were already coming into play. The Eastern Region, Enugu, where I was, was dominated by the Ibo tribe, the Western Region by the Yoruba, and the Northern Region by the Hausa/Fulani.

So we had had a consulate in the North in Kaduna for some while, and Ibadan in the West had been open, but it fell to me to open the new one in the Eastern region. And I did so under a great country team in Lagos. Joseph Palmer II was our ambassador, already the

dean of the FSOs in Africa. He had already served as principal officer in Salisbury and elsewhere in Africa in Nairobi. He was the ambassador. Jerry Green was the deputy chief of mission. I couldn't have had a better country team situation in Lagos. They gave me my head and said, “Bob, get on over there and get it cranked up.” I did so and we loved it so much that we extended our assignment there and went back for a third year. I think I would have gone back beyond that had they permitted it, but they wanted me back in Washington.

*Q: What were your principal duties?*

SMITH: Well, my duties were the same as any other principal officer. I had only one other substantive officer. I had a vice consul and two other American staff, a secretary and an administrative assistant. There were a number of Americans in Eastern Nigeria, many of them black Americans who had married Nigerians. We also had a USIS officer there.

In addition to the whole range of consular duties, politics in Nigeria were absolutely fascinating. We were already starting to see the beginnings of the terrible tribal divisions which later would almost tear the country apart. So to a far greater extent than I anticipated as a consul in an outlying province, I was doing a great deal of political and economic reporting. And it was all grist for the mill, not only in the embassy in Lagos, but back in Washington.

*Q: You were with which tribe?*

SMITH: The Ibos, who later were to establish Biafra, which touched off the civil war. One of the things involved in the struggle was who was going to control the federal government. There was always the competition as to which region had the most people and every time they did a census they would suddenly discover whole villages of 30,000 people that weren't there a few years earlier, and so forth. There was a terrible rivalry of that sort. Each tribe felt put upon by the other tribes.

The Ibos, by general agreement, then and now, seem to be among the most intelligent, hard working, articulate, outgoing people in Africa. That is a view I continue to hold today, certainly in Nigeria. And they were overwhelmingly Christian or animists, as were the Yorubas. But the Hausas, of course, were Moslem and dominated the federal government in the presence of the prime minister, even though an Ibo was president.

*Q: The fact that they were dominated, was this a policy on the part of the British?*

SMITH: Yes, I think so. The more conservative Moslem north, I think, the British felt more comfortable with. And, in fairness, they, in fact, did have the predominant population; and, measured strictly on a population basis, probably should have dominated the government. But their dominance was resented in the southern parts of the country, particularly in the Eastern Region.

But during my three years there, these divisions and rivalries were masked, so much so that you could get in trouble with a Nigerian by asking him outright what tribe he was from. He would bristle and say, “I'm a Nigerian.” Because everyone was attaching so much importance to building one Nigeria, that was the cry. Yet, underlying that, and when you'd get to know them really well, over a beer at night I would get vitriolic comments from my Ibo friends about the North or even the Yorubas in the West, and so forth, about how “We Ibos are put upon and we're not getting our share of the federal pie.” So this was all coming into play.

*Q: You would be reporting this back, but looking back on it, was there any real American interest in this other than this is a fascinating situation?*

SMITH: Well, yes, certainly. Nigeria was the largest country in Africa, with enormous natural resources and human resources, as well. And also, of course, in my region was the burgeoning oil industry down there. Shell/BP was already in production in the Rivers Area of Eastern Nigeria and there were American interests there already, to say nothing

of Shell/BP. We had, clearly, American interests and we, as a matter of policy from the very beginning, attached ourselves to strong support of the one Nigeria concept. We did not want to see Nigeria fall apart. We worked toward smoothing over some of these dissensions, and calming these inflamed tempers, and so forth.

*Q: I mean, after all, here were are, a country four, or five, or six thousand miles away, how could you, let's say, as a consul do anything? I mean, were you getting instructions to do anything in this nature or were you just playing a very passive role?*

SMITH: I think they left that largely to my own discretion. The major d#marches, obviously, were being made by the ambassador and the DCM, who visited all the consulates quite regularly. But because of the way the United States was regarded and the enormous popularity of Jack Kennedy (indeed, I have seen Kennedy's picture plastered up in mud huts all over Africa in those years), the Nigerians loved Jack Kennedy and the United States. We also had a major aid program going there. In the Eastern Region alone, I had over 200 American Peace Corps volunteers scattered all over the region doing everything from agricultural development, education, health.

*Q: This was, of course, the birth of the Peace Corps.*

SMITH: That's right.

*Q: How effective was it at this time?*

SMITH: Enormously effective. And some of the Peace Corps volunteers, even to the present, continue to correspond with Nigerian friends and to take their families back to Nigeria to the village in which they worked as young people 25 years ago. Very, very effective.

*Q: This was a brand new program. Were you watching over this thing with some apprehension of how it was going to work?*

SMITH: No. I think I was caught up, perhaps one could call it naivete, but those were very exciting days and Nigeria seemed to be doing it right. It was a truly democratic nation. The vote was there and, despite the conflicts about the population census and that sort of thing, it was truly democratic. There were distinct major political parties, one of them dominated by the Eastern Region, one by the West, another by the North. But they would fight these battles out at the polls. There were always disputes over the election results, but the winner won and that's simply the way it was. So we wanted to encourage this and to keep going. We wanted to encourage Nigeria's development. We knew they were going to walk across the African stage with long strides and we wanted to help them.

But I can't emphasize strongly enough the close ties that we all felt in those days between the United States and Nigeria. So much so that, when President Kennedy was assassinated, I have never seen such an outpouring of affection and genuine shock and distress in my life, before or since. A steady stream of callers at my residence lasted virtually all night. I'm speaking of Nigerians now, not just Americans or diplomatic and consular colleagues. The memorial service I arranged in his memory was attended by the Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Sir Francis Ibiam, a distinguished Presbyterian medical doctor and later politician, by the Premier, and the entire cabinet. And for weeks everything was concentrated on President Kennedy's assassination. It was as if he was their president, as well. A terrible shock to them. So I felt very close to them.

When I left, I was reassigned to the Department. I had been abroad then for almost ten years and they pulled me back to the Department, having me in mind for the Nigeria desk. That was filled, initially, though, so I took the Ghana desk for the first year.

*Q: This is 1965?*

SMITH: I came back in 1965 and from 1965 until 1966 I handled the Ghana desk. And toward the end of 1966 things in Nigeria went from bad to worse. It fell to my successor,

Bob Barnard, to evacuate American citizens because of the war. There were massacres of Ibos in the North. I mean real massacres, they were killed in the streets.

*Q: This is in Nigeria?*

SMITH: Yes. 1965 and 1966. So the civil war broke out. The Eastern Region tried to peel off, seceded from the Federation and declared itself the Republic of Biafra. By this time Ambassador Palmer had come back as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, so I worked very closely with him during the war years.

*Q: I'd like to come back to that but, first, why don't we talk about the Ghana time. You were, again, dealing with Ghana at a difficult time. Could you explain what our relations were in 1965 and 1966, how you saw it from the desk?*

SMITH: Before coming back and taking over the desk I drove overland from Enugu, west to Lagos, and then all the way across the west coast into Accra for a week's visit there with the embassy staff in Ghana. I'd been there before but only briefly. We had a very fine staff there, one of whom, a junior political officer on the staff then, is now our ambassador in Moscow, Jack Matlock. That was where I first met Jack.

Kwame Nkrumah was still in power in 1965. And to say that he was difficult for the embassy and the United States Government would be the understatement of the year. He seemed to be, at times, almost losing his mind. Ghana had been left—Ghana was the first to come to independence—in really excellent shape by the British—myths to the contrary notwithstanding. They had a very favorable balance of payments. They had millions and millions in foreign reserves, hard currency. And Nkrumah simply ran the country into the ground by his tortured anti-Western, Socialistic, anti-capitalist attitudes.

The strange thing about that initial visit to Ghana was, even though I was being briefed on the idiosyncrasies of Nkrumah, at the same time individual Ghanaians, even senior civil servants, to say nothing of the man on the street, couldn't have been nicer or more

blatantly pro-American to the extent of their saying at times that, “You mustn't pay too much about what Osaygefo says.” Osaygefo was a name he was called by the Ghanaian people. Ghanaians, perhaps second only to the Ibos, from whom I had just come, are among the most likeable, pleasant, nice people in all of Africa. They are simply an enormously likeable, warm, generous, outgoing people. I can't find enough adjectives to use with respect to the Ghanaians.

It was tragic for us to sit back and see Nkrumah running this country into the ground the way he did, and it was happening right before our eyes. When I went there in 1965, there were still a number of hotels in downtown Accra that served excellent meals. I remember having lunch on the patio of one of those hotels. By the time I went back years later as ambassador, none of them could do that. There was nothing to be had. There was nothing to eat, et cetera. And almost all of it was attributed to Nkrumah's madness. I don't mean that literally.

*Q: Was there concern that there might be a mental problem there?*

SMITH: I don't think seriously, no.

*Q: This was an attitude?*

SMITH: An attitude, yes. It was fascinating to deal with it. He was concentrating on the urban areas. And this is an age-old story in Africa where African leaders tend to concentrate on keeping their urban populations happy at the expense of their rural populations. And Nkrumah did this with respect to his cocoa farmers, cocoa being the largest source of foreign exchange. And as a result, they couldn't get people to man to cocoa farms and the country just spun out of control.

So much so that, while I was on the Ghana desk nine or ten months later, they had had enough and Nkrumah was overthrown in a coup. They did this in relatively bloodless fashion. While Nkrumah was in the air flying to Red China, he was met on the ground in

Peking by his Chinese host and it fell to them to inform him that he was no longer Head of State in the Republic of Ghana. So that was a fascinating time in a fascinating country.

*Q: Was our feeling one of passivity towards Nkrumah? I'm talking about the time that you were dealing with it. Were we trying to say enough is enough because the man was attacking us, at least verbally, all the time.*

SMITH: He certainly was. We tried for years to get along with Nkrumah. We would turn the other cheek at times and do everything we could to assuage his anger. Nothing worked with him, however. And, again, while I was on the Desk, I think Nkrumah dropped the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak, in that he published a new book called Neo-Colonialism. I've forgotten the subtitle, which was simply outrageous. It accused the United States of every sin imaginable to man. We were blamed for everything in the world.

The book was so bad that I remember the then Assistant Secretary, G. Mennen Williams, called me up and gave me that book and said, “Bob, I know this is bad. I don't know how bad. I want you to take it home tonight and read it. You're not going to get any sleep and I apologize for that, but on my desk, by eight o'clock tomorrow morning, I've got to have a written summary of this because I have called the Ghanaian ambassador in at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. We're going to protest this book.” There had already been advance publicity so we knew it was bad, but we hadn't had our hands on a copy. And it was everything we feared it would be. It was awful.

And the next morning—of course, he had me in on this meeting as the note taker—a lovely, old man, Michael Ribiero, was the Ghanaian ambassador. Hated Nkrumah privately, but was a good soldier trying to put the best face on this, a career officer in their foreign service and very respected here and in Ghana. Governor Williams, of course, was a relatively mild-mannered man. I had never heard Soapy Williams raise his voice until that conversation. Neither have I ever heard an ambassador get a tongue lashing like Ribiero got from Assistant Secretary Williams that morning. He, unfortunately, tried a couple times

to interrupt the governor when he was making a point. He had my notes in front of him. And at one point, when Ribiero interrupted him, said, “Just a minute, Mr. Ambassador, don't interrupt me. I'm not through.” And he continued to go on. He was raising his voice. He was shaking his finger in the ambassador's face. And it was a very painful, hour-long interview. To put it mildly, he protested vigorously the contents and publication of this book.

I think the publication of that book might also have contributed in a material way to his overthrow shortly thereafter. The Ghanaian people, as I say, did not share Nkrumah's views on many things. The Ghanaians have always had a warm relationship with the United States. Nkrumah simply, as the British say, went round the bend and they got a belly full of it and booted him out of office.

I also remember, the morning of the coup, I got the call about 2 a.m. here at the house and went into the Department and immediately set up a little task force in the Operations Center. Later in the same morning, about 8 or 8:30, Secretary Rusk wandered down the hall and came in and said, “I've seen the early reports, but I just want to hear it firsthand. What's going on in Ghana?” When I related how Nkrumah had landed in Peking and had been informed by his Chinese hosts of what had happened in Ghana, Dean Rusk broke into an ear-splitting grin. I've never seen him look so happy.

*Q: Enough was enough, I guess.*

SMITH: Enough was enough, yes.

*Q: Again, this is an unclassified interview, and I know there's been accusations. I think, actually, while you were in Ghana they came out to the fore again that the CIA had been involved. Did you have any feel towards that while you were there?*

SMITH: Yes. We had been accused of that all along. There was nothing to it. I mean, it was obvious that we were not among his legions of supporters, but neither were we

involved because there was no reason to be involved. The Ghanaian military were quite capable of dealing with this on their own, as they did. Unfortunately, the government that followed was, in its own way, almost as bad as Nkrumah's. We had high hopes for it, but it didn't materialize.

In just a few years that civilian, truly democratic government, elected in a free election, was itself overthrown by the military because they hadn't been able to correct the economic imbalances and so forth, and there was corruption, which just seemed to be endemic. So Ghana then went on without any direct involvement on my part until I later went back as ambassador years later.

*Q: Well, let's move on to Nigeria. You became the head of the Nigerian Desk in 1966. For somebody who was looking at this record, what does it mean to be the head of a desk or a desk officer for Nigeria, for example?*

SMITH: I think, perhaps, the simplest way of putting this is that the State Department desk officer for any given country is the point man for that country within the United States Government. And any questions, almost without exception, having to do with that country, that desk officer, if he doesn't have the answer, is supposed to be able to put his finger on it right away. He is the action officer on the incoming telegrams from that post and is expected to know a great deal about the country.

Ideally, he will, of course, have served in that country. So I was in an ideal situation, having just finished three years in Nigeria. I was also blessed by the fact that Governor Williams had been replaced by Joseph Palmer as Assistant Secretary, with whom I had a very close personal relationship.

*Q: And who had been ambassador.*

SMITH: And who had been ambassador in Nigeria for four years. So the war came as a terrible, personal blow both to Assistant Secretary Palmer and to me because we had so

thoroughly enjoyed our service in Nigeria, and we were so fond of the Nigerian people. Conscious as we were of the tribal problems which rent the country apart, we were very sad to have it happen. In my own personal case, and I guess Foreign Service Officers have this kind of problem from time to time, I was in personal agony because my heart was pulling me in one direction in that my personal friends, my closest friends, in Nigeria, were all rebels overnight. They called themselves Biafrans. And very dear friends, my children's teachers, the entire cabinet of Premier Okpara, and so forth, and many of the army officers that I knew were suddenly rebels.

Instinctively, therefore, in my heart I had a certain latent sympathy for them because I knew what they had gone through the last few years. I knew how mistreated they felt, how put upon. So I couldn't avoid a personal feeling of sympathy. And yet, our policy, which I must say, I helped formulate and adhere to over those years, was one of clear-cut support for the federal government. We felt very strongly that the worst things that could happen was to see Nigeria torn apart. Had that happened, I think we would have seen a real domino effect in Africa in that there isn't a single country in Black Africa that doesn't have similar tribal divisions. If you once start down the road of tribes being able to secede from the national government, it would be utter chaos and you'd have a Balkanization such as the world has never seen before.

*Q: We'd already been facing this problem in the Congo.*

SMITH: Yes, that's true. And we had a similar policy there.

*Q: Did you feel that the Congo example was very much before you?*

SMITH: I don't remember Congo being much of an example. I'm sure it may have been in the back of our minds. On the other hand, and, again, I will confess to some prejudice here, the Nigerians were simply a great deal more civilized. When the Belgians left Kinshasa, there wasn't a single graduate engineer in the country. Nigeria was full of Rhodes Scholars, engineers, doctors, lawyers. The British, in short, did a much better job,

so we had higher expectations for Nigeria, much higher. But I had this ambivalence in that I was sympathetic to the Biafrans on the one hand, but our policy was to support to the federal government.

*Q: Let me ask a bit about this. All of a sudden all hell was breaking loose in Nigeria. How did policy develop? I mean, all of a sudden did everyone say, "Okay, let's sit down. We've got to have a policy."*

SMITH: No. I think it was not a question so much of formulating a new policy as continuing the old one. We have always taken the position that tribalism was one of the problems and that African states must have a strong central government and they must have a feeling of oneness, of unity. We had contributed to this all the time. When the secession came, we had strongly advised the Ibos not to go down this road.

I think, in their heart of hearts, they really felt that we would support them. They felt so close to us. The Ibos, I think, more than other tribes in Nigeria, felt close to Americans. They fancied themselves like Americans in their attitude toward work, and their gregariousness, and so forth. I think it came as a real shock to many of them that we did not support them. Now mind you, many private Americans did. Indeed, one of the most painful mornings I spent during those early years of the Biafra War was one Saturday morning when Joe Palmer and I drove out to Senator Kennedy's residence in McLean.

*Q: This was Robert Kennedy?*

SMITH: No, Teddy Kennedy. We briefed him on the war and our policy there. Senator Kennedy made no bones about his sympathies lying with the Biafrans because the Biafrans had mounted an enormous and very successful propaganda campaign about their suffering.

*Q: You said you went to see Senator Teddy Kennedy.*

SMITH: I should back up by mentioning how successful the Biafran, or Ibo, propaganda campaign was. I hadn't, at that point, seen anything quite equal to it except, possibly, the Israelis. They managed to get cover stories in Time, in Newsweek, Life, with the cry of “genocide,” that these horrible northern Moslems in Nigeria were trying, literally, to wipe out the Ibos as a people, all eight or ten million of them, however many there were. This was not true. We never thought it was true. Ambassador Palmer, of course, knew Balewa, Azikiwe, and the others much better than I did. And later, when Balewa was assassinated, General Gowon became the Head of State. He was a hymn-singing, practicing Methodist, although from one of the small Northern tribes, not the major tribes. We never really thought for a minute that genocide was the intention of anyone.

*Q: Let me ask a question that there was a hint of in what you are saying. Do you think that there was a parallel between this and, you might say, the media looking at the problem of Israel? In other words, here is an outgoing people and here are these Moslems. Maybe it wasn't the Israeli lobby, but the supporters of Israel saw a parallel here.*

SMITH: Absolutely.

*Q: And if you let one go, the other might go.*

SMITH: Absolutely. The Ibos, with great pride, called themselves in those years, “the Israelis of Africa.” They milked that for all it was worth.

*Q: So this is much of the reason for the success of this?*

SMITH: Yes. Yes. They raised enormous amounts of money here and in Israel, and elsewhere. The Israelis flew in military equipment, and so forth. Several other states did, too, the French and others. In short, the Biafrans almost succeeded, especially, in Britain because of their British ties, but elsewhere in Western Europe, and in Israel, and in the

United States. They developed an enormous reservoir of good will and support. Our policy was not to do that, of course. So this became very awkward for us.

Also, because the Ibos are so Christian, they managed to enlist the support of Catholic Relief Services. The major hierarchy of the Catholic Church here was strongly supportive of Biafra. That, of course, impacted on Senator Kennedy. They also enlisted the support of the World Council of Churches, and the American Jewish Committee. And I can best illustrate the point by relating that Catholic Relief Services, the World Council of Churches, and the American Jewish Committee, and several other religious organizations all got together and demanded a meeting with Secretary Rusk on the Biafran War, demanding that we change our policy and stop the “genocide” going on in Biafra.

So I arranged this meeting. Assistant Secretary Palmer and I accompanied the Secretary. And for an hour or an hour-and-a-half, these distinguished religious leaders of all the major faiths were ripping into Secretary Rusk, whom we had prepared, obviously, as best we could, to answer these questions. And I must say, the Secretary responded beautifully, keeping his eye on the U.S. interests down the road. “We didn't want to see the country fall apart and, indeed, we did not believe for a minute the charge of genocide. Any civil war is horrible, brother against brother, et cetera, et cetera.” And the Secretary handled this beautifully. But I don't think we satisfied these gentlemen.

I'll never forget what happened then. The meeting broke up and we saw the religious leaders out the door. We left the conference room and started walking down the hall. I was sort of lagging behind the Secretary and Ambassador Palmer. I remember Mr. Rusk put his arm around Joe's shoulder and looked at him as they were striding down the hall, and he said, “Joe, congratulations.” He said, “You've succeeded in getting the Catholics and the Jews and the Protestants all mad at us at the same time. What do you do in your spare time?” And he laughed. [Laughs] These were difficult times, and we needed to keep our sense of humor.

*Q: Well, after all, when you look at it, we have a policy that makes sense, but Nigeria, or even Africa, is not at the top of our plate or what have you.*

SMITH: No, but Nigeria was at the top of our African plate.

*Q: At the same time, looking at it at as a practical measure, one can say that, in the Middle East, Israel is a political entity because of support within the United States, rather than looking at it as in our real strategic interests. I mean, there's a strong case to be made there. But because of political pressure we give it our unqualified support. Now here you have almost the same pressures, albeit not over a long period of time, but rising up. The State Department and the Administration often gives in to expediency, particularly, political expediency. Why didn't we give in on this one?*

SMITH: Well, I take great pride in that. I think I helped contribute to it because I know Ambassador Palmer would often refer to me as illustrating his point that, however sympathetic we might be to Biafrans on a personal basis, here is my desk officer who lived there for three years and knows them intimately, but even he understands that we can't let the secession succeed, not that we would lift a finger militarily to prevent it. We had a very firm policy of providing neither arms nor ammunition to either side in this dispute. Unfortunately, a lot of the other countries didn't follow this, so they were getting arms from the Soviets and some of the NATO countries, as well.

I would also attribute it to what I have already referred to, and that is the enormous success of the Biafrans' public relations effort. It was skillfully done. They retained high powered firms both in California and New York, and there was a steady drumbeat in the press. But I think, certainly, Ambassador Palmer, and the Secretary, and the President never wavered in their support. Indeed, one of the first national decision memoranda put before the new President Nixon was on the Biafran War. Nixon, too, came down firmly on the side of maintaining our policy.

But you are quite right, we were under enormous domestic political pressure. I will not identify this congressman, but I got an angry phone call one day from a congressman who demanded that we change our policy. I explained as best I could why we could not. I got a call from some Jewish leaders in New York who demanded the same thing. I had to refuse, there was just no way, this policy was firm and fixed. He said, “Well, I think you're going to be hearing from some of our friends on Capitol Hill.” And within a week, the Department was inundated with irate telegrams, letters, and so forth, from representatives and senators on this.

Some of them, otherwise intelligent men and women, would have gotten us involved militarily, I'm sorry to say. Some U.S. senators, and I won't identify them, were actually pressuring us to use U.S. Air Force transport aircraft to drop food, supplies, and equipment behind the front lines into Biafra. And, of course, we kept refusing.

Going back to my personal agony on this, to reflect our support of the federal government, we would not receive or meet with Biafran officials. We didn't recognize it as an independent country. They built a clandestine air strip in Eastern Nigeria and managed to fly out on these various fund raising missions, and so forth. I remember on one occasion Sir Francis Ibiam, himself, the Governor of Eastern Nigeria, got to the States, got to Washington and asked to see me. What to do? Ambassador Palmer said, “Bob, there's no way you can receive him in the Department.” And I said, “Well, right. But we need to know what he has to say.”

To make a long story short, I found myself, literally, climbing up the backstairs of a Washington Hotel to a virtually clandestine meeting with the distinguished Sir Francis Ibiam, the Governor. And it was painful because he said, literally, “Bob, you know us. How can you let this happen to us? They're killing my people.” So it was a difficult time for me.

*Q: Were you there when the war was over or had you left?*

SMITH: Yes. And it ended in the way that we anticipated. That is to say, the federal government finally prevailed and crushed the secession. But what made us happiest was not that so much as the way they handled the defeated Eastern Region. Like Lincoln, they were very generous in their victory. There was no genocide or anything approaching that.

*Q: I think this surprised so many of us because we had been hearing the drumbeats, and all this, and thought, "Oh, my God, here it comes." And it didn't.*

SMITH: Never happened.

*Q: Which shows that you all knew what you were talking about.*

SMITH: It made honest men out of us. And I must say, it was a sigh of relief, in a way. Ambassador Palmer and I went out to Nigeria several times during the war, of course, and we would meet with General Gowon in Lagos. I had great confidence in him. I still think it was tragic that he was later assassinated. He was one of those military leaders who was genuinely skilled in the art of governments, which is a rare thing, I think, in Africa.

*Q: In your time on the desk you dealt with both Governor Mennen Williams, Soapy Williams, and with Joseph Palmer. I wonder if you could do a little of, as we used to say in school, compare and contrast their styles, and interest, and the way they dealt with matters in the Department, as you saw it from your point?*

SMITH: I admired both men enormously. Governor Williams, of course, came out of the American domestic political scene, a very popular four-term governor in Michigan. And I think what impressed many of us, as you may recall, was that President Kennedy appointed Soapy Williams as Assistant Secretary for Africa before he appointed Secretary Rusk, attaching, thereby, the importance to the job that Kennedy felt. And Soapy certainly shared that. He was genuinely interested in Africa. He was an indefatigable traveler, like a politician must be. He was a very fine listener, and so forth. I don't think he was an intellectual heavyweight, but he was bright. And he, above all, knew to listen to his people.

I think there was some naivete on Soapy William's part in that he expected too much too soon from Africa and was, I think, disappointed, as he was, of course, with Nkrumah, in the case of Ghana.

Joseph Palmer, on the other hand, brought to the job 20 to 25 years experience in Africa and elsewhere. He was a consummate professional foreign service officer. He was very, very bright, out of Harvard, was a very polished, intelligent, hard-working diplomat and knew Africa very well. He was cautious, conservative in his approach.

I didn't mention this before and I was very negligent not to have done so. We had a very fine professional in Lagos who replaced Ambassador Palmer there in the form of Elbert G. Matthews as ambassador. He was another seasoned professional. He'd been ambassador to Liberia before and knew Africa very well. He was a strong supporter of the federal government.

I guess I had a closer, personal relationship, for obvious reasons, with Ambassador Palmer. And, of course, then we were dealing with a crisis situation—12, 15 hour days. Many times Ambassador Palmer and I would be there until 10 o'clock at night, getting instructions out to the embassy, or something of that sort. I liked them both and they were both very effective in the job, very effective.

*Q: Speaking from a somewhat removed perspective, not having dealt with African affairs, but the impression of many of the people in the foreign service was that Mennen Williams was a man whose heart was in the right place, but you mention this naivete, that it was hard to report from some posts in Africa if you said, you know, this country is falling apart, or this is a lousy leader, or something like this. He didn't want to hear this, particularly, if we were talking about native leaders. There was a certain amount of caution in how one reported because of this advocacy of the new independence movements in Africa.*

SMITH: Well, there may be something to that. I have no direct experience of that because I was in a consulate, reporting through the embassy, most of the time.

*Q: And in a successful area, too.*

SMITH: Yes. Nigeria was successful. Certainly, there was nothing like that under Ambassador Palmer. With Williams I would simply leave it with naivete. I think his heart certainly was in the right place, but he expected rather too much, I think.

*Q: I think he reflected how many people in the United States felt. Certainly, you might say the liberal wing, and I include myself in this, wished Africa all the best.*

SMITH: Indeed, we all did. Sure.

*Q: I'd like to move on. You then went from this rather agonizing place to quite a different world, but at the same time, as difficult a world, when you were assigned from 1970 to 1974 to South Africa.*

SMITH: Yes. My last year in Washington, after I closed out the Nigerian Desk, I was a student at the National War College for a year. I was assigned from there as deputy chief of mission and minister counselor in the embassy in Pretoria, South Africa.

*Q: Could I ask just a little about the War College? Did you find the War College a good year as far as professionally, or not?*

SMITH: Absolutely delightful year. I learned a great deal but, most of all, it was a delight to get out from under the pressure I had been working under for the previous four years. I still refer to it as, perhaps, my favorite year in my career. I didn't have to work nearly as hard.

South Africa, again, was a choice assignment for me, particularly since the ambassador, who was named just a few weeks before I was named, was a political appointee with no

Foreign Service experience whatever. I was, therefore, the senior career State Department officer in the embassy.

*Q: His name was John Hurd?*

SMITH: John Hurd, from Texas. A delightful man, warm, generous, outgoing, but with a considerable bit of naivete, both with respect to Africa and even, indeed, the civil rights movement here in the United States.

*Q: Why?*

SMITH: He had been Chairman of the Texas Republicans or Texas Republicans for Nixon, I forget exactly. He always insisted he was not a heavy, major contributor, but he was active in Republican politics in Laredo and San Antonio, Texas, and it was, admittedly, a political assignment. But John Hurd was enormously popular with the South Africans.

*Q: When you say South Africans, what do you mean?*

SMITH: With white South Africans. Your point is well taken. He was popular among the embassy staff, too, in terms of John Hurd as a man, as an individual, because he looked every inch of the American ambassador, tall, handsome, distinguished, and without a mean bone in his body. He was just a warm, generous guy.

But in a way, I think he felt then, and perhaps he still feels now, that I pushed him awfully hard a lot of the time to do things that were “nasty” as far as the South African government was concerned. I had very strong views then and do now about this institutionalized racism that permeates the scene out there.

So those four years as DCM to John, in one way, were delightful in the sense of our personal relationship and the beauty of the country and the people that we liked, black and white. At the same time, it was a real strain because I was always regarded by the South African government as the guy who the State Department sent out to keep John Hurd from

being John Hurd and letting his normal instincts run; i.e, let the South Africans handle their own problem. “It's an internal problem and why should we be butting into their business. We wouldn't like it if they were butting into our business, et cetera, et cetera.” And the whole human rights equation didn't loom that large in Ambassador Hurd's mind. I say this, despite the way it may read, without any rancor whatever. He's very conservative. But to me and, happily, to the overwhelmingly majority of my embassy staff, the South African government was simply anathema in many respects.

*Q: But in a way, you can say, “Okay, but you represent the United States Government's policy and, being the principal professional there, you wouldn't be giving guidance or pushing according to your predilections but more because this is American policy towards Africa and such and so, and Mr. Ambassador, you should do such and so even if you don't want to.” Did you feel, maybe, you were giving a little extra twist or something because of how you felt?*

SMITH: Perhaps at times I did. But on the other hand, our policy was all right. Our policy was one of open condemnation of apartheid, even then and that was during the Nixon years. There was no getting around that, but there are different ways of looking at a policy and then implementing it on the ground, as you very well know. Or you can wink and nod at a policy and simply not put your back into it. I guess the basic difference between us is I really wanted to put my back into it to a greater extent than the ambassador.

Having said that, it was under our regime, the Hurd-Smith regime in South Africa, that the first black foreign service officer was appointed to our staff in the embassy in Pretoria. He was a young economic officer named Jim Baker, no relation to the current Secretary. While Ambassador Hurd made all the right noises, he did have to swallow hard on this because I think he thought that was really going too far and rubbing the white South African noses in it a bit, whereas I didn't share that view.

*Q: Whose initiative was this assignment made because, obviously, it was a policy initiative? It was in the papers of the day. I mean, it wasn't something that was unnoticed.*

SMITH: I, privately, had been pushing it for some time and I think Assistant Secretary David Newsom and Bev Carter, his principal deputy and later my predecessor in Liberia, probably were instrumental in pushing that appointment through. Mind you, not that there was vociferous opposition to it. I don't know what John Hurd said privately on the telephone, perhaps, to someone back in Washington, but he never really opposed us in any open fashion at all. He would make veiled references to it to me, privately. He'd say, “Bob, is this really necessary? And isn't he going to be ostracized?” He would come up with reasons. “Where are we going to house him? Will he be able to go into the same restaurant and eat with us?” I would have to keep reassuring him. So he was sort of dragged into this a bit. He couldn't have been nicer to him when it happened.

I don't mean to say for a minute that John Hurd is in any way, shape, or form a racist or anything approaching that. It's just that one brings different perspectives to this and he felt strongly that we shouldn't be pushing the south Africans quite so hard.

*Q: To finish up on this, how did the Baker assignment work out?*

SMITH: It worked out very well. For one thing, the South African government leaned over backwards to show us that they were not racist and that they did not put American blacks in the same category with their own Africans. Therefore, he was lionized. When Jim Baker arrived, this young officer, his picture was in every paper in South Africa.

I remember once when we went to lunch with the ambassador, Jim, and I, and our political counselor and a few others, the maitre d' in this restaurant pointedly ignored Ambassador Hurd and walked up to Jim Baker, this young black officer, shook his hand, and gave him the seat of honor at the table, which gave us all a roar, including Ambassador Hurd. The

South Africans worked very hard to make it work. This is not to say that there wasn't real pressure and strain on Jim, as there has been on every black officer since.

*Q: I was going to ask that. How did this work out personally?*

SMITH: It was a great strain on him but he had the moxie to handle this, and the intelligence, and the emotional stability. He handled it very well. He also, obviously, provided another entree into the black community which, while we had it before, we didn't have it to the same extent as we did with a black officer.

*Q: We're talking about the 1970 to 1974 period. What were the United States' concerns in South Africa?*

SMITH: We had genuine human rights concerns there. Our concern was that the country was going to explode some day unless they took their figurative foot off the neck of the black man. A position, by the way, I still hold because I still think we may have a blood bath in South Africa one of these days. And we did not want to see that happen.

In those early 1970s, I'm sorry to say, some senior South African officials, I think, really thought that, if a race war were to actually occur in South Africa, that we would come militarily to their rescue, that we could not stand idly by and see white South Africans slaughtered in their beds by Africans. I think only now are they beginning to realize that that was never the case, that we would not lift a finger.

*Q: Was this a question that would come up and that you would try to scotch?*

SMITH: Very hard.

*Q: How about our military attach#s?*

SMITH: The military attach#s, in those days, had very close relations with the South African military. I don't think that's the case anymore. I think their presence contributed

to that feeling. Also, the fact that, for instance, the head of the South African Navy and my ambassador, John Hurd, were tied up alongside each other as Navy commanders during World War II at some point during the war in the Atlantic someplace. The South Africans would keep reminding us that they fought with us in several wars, that they were vehemently anti-communist, and so forth. They made all the right noises.

If you could leave the race question aside, which in my judgment, is absolutely impossible, the South Africans would be the strongest allies we have anywhere in the world, if you look at in those terms. But you can't put the race questions aside, in my judgment.

*Q: Did you find that the communist menace was raised every time?*

SMITH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

*Q: Was this having any real effect on our policy? I mean, were you getting concerns from Congress or from other American business interests and all this saying, well, let's not push too hard because if we do this the communists are going to take over?*

SMITH: I would have to say we got very little of that. On the other hand, we were getting pressure from the liberal side in Congress, particularly members of the Black Caucus who were critical that we were too close to the South Africans and that we should take a tougher policy towards that country. Actually, it's remarkable when one looks back on it.

The last eight years our policy has been called constructive engagement. In point of fact, I think that would be a fair characterization of the Nixon-Kissinger policies in the early '70s because, when I look back on it, that's about what we were doing. We were engaged and our leverage was then and is now quite limited. But we felt that, by continuing to whittle away at them and hammer these points home, we would slowly get them to come to their senses. But that was not to happen and has not yet happened.

They continue to think that American blacks are not blacks. They're colored, as far as the white South African is concerned, because there's a mixture of white and black. And, therefore, when we talk about their race problem, they simply say, “Bob, you just don't understand blacks. You just don't understand. Congressman Diggs is not black. Look at him. He's colored.” To them, that changes the whole picture. It's really quite pathetic.

I had discussions with Prime Minister Vorster and so many others. But we felt it was sort of a one step forward, two step back thing, and that they would continue to do outrageous things. Our closest white South African friends, of course, tended to be in the progressive liberal community, people like Helen Suzman and Lolin Eglin, who remain some of our closest friends today. And they fought the good fight for a long time, but it's far from over.

*Q: Did you find that you had much relations with the Dutch element?*

SMITH: Yes. It was somewhat more strained. The current president, P. W. Botha, we used to call “Guns” Botha because, in our day, he was the Minister of Defense. Ambassador Hurd had him to the residence for dinner, as we tried to do with all the cabinet. But the Afrikaner was always much more suspicious of us and of our motives, particularly of me. There was less of that with Ambassador Hurd. They genuinely liked Ambassador Hurd. But the career officers in the State Department, they were quite suspicious of them. Too liberal, too protective of black rights, et cetera.

*Q: Did you have any contact with the black community?*

SMITH: Oh, yes. That had been started even before I arrived but I certainly intensified it. I had a terrific political section staff and we worked very hard at it. We were somewhat circumscribed. There were certain places where you couldn't go, or they couldn't go, and so forth, but yes, we would have lunches and dinners. We had more success in that we could easily have, and did have, a great number of functions with black South Africans.

Where you got into trouble, where you had to be very, very careful, was trying to mix them with white South Africans.

I remember once the Minister of Police Affairs had a suspicion that I was going to have a black South African at our residence. He happened to be a very distinguished doctor. And he asked me flat out before coming were there going to be black South Africans there. I said, “Well, yes, Jimmy, there will be.” And he said, “Aw, come on. I can't come, Bob. Don't do that to me. I can't come.” Private Afrikaners would and there are a number of progressive, liberal Afrikaners. They're not all Neanderthals by any means. But the government, the ministers in particular, some of them were just beyond the pale. They just were and are hopeless, some of them, and they wanted nothing to do with them.

I think you'd have small successes in that I've had a number of Afrikaners, after a mixed function at our home or one of the other embassy homes, come up to me and say, “Bob, I want to thank you because this is the first time I have ever eaten with a black man and talked with him as an equal. I want to thank you for that.” But this is just such a small thing compared to the enormity of the problem.

*Q: What about the American business community? This has become such a focal point. This is the one place where we can sort of show our policy by trying to get people to disinvest, American firms, from not putting money into South African firms. Was this much of an element at that time?*

SMITH: With some exceptions, I think the average attitude of the American business community in those years was, don't rock the boat, don't fiddle with the status quo. I must say, in more recent years, I think they've become far more enlightened. We were constantly pressuring them to do what they could to upgrade the working conditions, salary, et cetera, of their black employees. Many of them tried hard but I think most of that has happened in the last few years.

*Q: At your time it was, “We're here to do business and we'll do what we have to.”*

SMITH: Yes. We stay out of politics, don't talk to me about politics. So they took sort of a standoff attitude. But we've leaned on them, I think, more strongly in recent years with some success.

*Q: I'd like to move on to your first ambassadorial assignment. How did that come about?*

SMITH: I got a phone call one Sunday morning from the Director General asking me if I would like to go to Rwanda as ambassador. I said, “Of course, certainly.” They said, “Okay. We'll put your name in the hopper.” Within a few weeks I got another phone call saying, “No, no. You're not going to Rwanda, you're going to Malta in Europe.” And it turned out that Henry Kissinger was in the middle of that GLOP Program. What was it, global outreach or global outlook?

*Q: Mainly, it was because of South America, I believe.*

SMITH: Well, at any rate, when this came to him, he was then secretary, he looked at my record and concluded, “Hey, Smith has been long enough in Africa. Let's get him out of Africa for awhile.” So he switched me to Malta. A very happy circumstance. I thoroughly enjoyed the two years in Malta.

*Q: You were there 1974 to 1976?*

SMITH: 1974 to 1976. A delightful, beautiful, little island. The best living conditions I've had anywhere in the Foreign Service. Beautiful residence, friendly, friendly people. Again, openly avowedly pro-Western and pro-American, except for the government then in power. And Prime Minister Dom Mintoff was a thorn in my side from the very beginning. He was at times anti-Western, anti-British, anti-American, would not let the Sixth Fleet ships call in there even for liberty, et cetera. And he maintained that posture throughout my time.

*Q: Could you give an evaluation of him? I mean, sometimes people do this because this is how they feel they're going to make their political points.*

SMITH: I think Dom Mintoff honestly saw himself in the role as a bridge builder between East and West. I think he really thought that Malta, small as it is, could best serve the interests of world peace by acting as a bridge between the East and the West following a policy of strict neutrality. Therefore, while he would not let the Sixth Fleet into Malta, neither would he let Soviet warships into Malta. You know, a plague on both your houses.

But in point of fact, he was a classic Fabian socialist out of the trade union movement. He genuinely was anti-capitalist, virulently anti-Tory, in terms of the British and, indeed, he later threw out the RAF and Royal Marines that were there while we were there. I never really questioned his sincerity in all this. It was unfortunate because I think the majority of the Maltese people did not share his views on those subjects. But he was a very effective, strong, political leader, domestically. He did a lot for the common man. And he kept getting reelected until the last general election where his party was thrown out.

I think one of the best jobs in the Foreign Service right now would be the American ambassador in Malta with a nationalist government in power. It would be delightful because my good friends, who were then in opposition, are now in government.

*Q: Did we have our eye on Malta as a possible NATO base?*

SMITH: No, no.

*Q: Had we pretty well written it off?*

SMITH: Don't need it. We don't need it anymore because of Sicily, Italy, Greece, and Spain. I don't think there's any thought of that at all. We would have liked, and I tried hard, to get the Sixth Fleet liberty privileges there because it's a delightful liberty spot. When the admiral commanding the Sixth Fleet asked me out for a weekend at sea on the carrier

Forrestal, Mintoff wouldn't even let one of our helicopters come in to Malta, land, and pick me up. My British colleague gave me a RAF helicopter to fly me to the carriers and back. But that's water over the dam. It's a delightful little country and a delightful people.

*Q: Do we have any particular interests there? Did we have concerns, for example, that the Chinese were sending some people there and Qadhafi was making noises?*

SMITH: The Chinese and the Libyans were both active there. My greatest concern while I was there was the Libyans. I met Qadhafi on Malta, as a matter of fact, when he came on a state visit. Yes, we were concerned that Mintoff would go too far into that camp and he did for awhile until he pulled back. The Chinese weren't that much of a problem.

*Q: It was just more a ploy?*

SMITH: Yes. He delighted in playing East against West. His recurring theme with me, personally, throughout my two-year tenure there, was, “Mr. Ambassador, I am the only European head of government that has not had a visit from Henry Kissinger.” And he pounded on me for two years to get Henry Kissinger to stop by on a visit. He was getting no U.S. aid, of course. We don't give them any aid; they don't really need it.

Ironically enough, during the last few months of my tenure there, there was a chiefs of mission conference in London which Secretary Kissinger attended and I bearded him about that in Elliot Richardson's residence in London. Elliot was then the ambassador there. I actually got Secretary Kissinger's agreement that on his next trip, barring disaster of some sort, he would find some means of touching down in Malta, if only to have lunch. Ironically enough, I was transferred to Ghana before that ever happened. He never made it. Mintoff will never forgive either one of us, I'm sure. He's an egomaniac. Mintoff thinks he is one of the world's great leaders and he conducts himself that way, unfortunately.

*Q: Well, in a way, his posture was such to gain him some attention.*

SMITH: Oh, yes.

*Q: There might be dedication there and sincerity, but at the same time there is no other way for a very small power to gain attention than to get in between and to be somewhat of a gadfly.*

SMITH: And often to make life miserable for the superpowers, which the Maltese did in one European conference after another. Malta would be the one country objecting. They would get consensus on a course of action and suddenly the Maltese representative would object and throw the whole thing out the window, that sort of thing. So he succeeded, really, in getting everybody mad at him.

*Q: Do we have any desire to give any economic or any other type of assistance?*

SMITH: No.

*Q: Do we just stay out of it?*

SMITH: Yes. We now have a very friendly government in place.

*Q: Did you sort of consider yourself having what amounts to a holding brief, just keeping the flag flying?*

SMITH: Yes, I did.

*Q: Or did we have a policy that we thought we might go with?*

SMITH: Obviously, I was the low man on the totem pole in terms of our European chiefs of mission during those years. I remember my marching orders from Art Hartman when I went out there—Art was then Assistant Secretary for Europe—he said, “Quite frankly, Bob, the way we'll know that you're really doing your job well is if we don't hear from you very

often.” And I took that quite literally. I didn't do nearly as much reporting there as I did at other posts.

*Q: We just finished with your time eating lotus in Malta.*

SMITH: That's a good way to put it.

*Q: As a matter of fact, that's around that area where they ate lotus. Then you moved to another difficult assignment, and that was Accra, Ghana.*

SMITH: Yes.

*Q: We're talking about 1976 to 1979 when you were ambassador there. How did this come about?*

SMITH: I was on home leave after two years in Malta. I was in the West visiting relatives. The Department tracked me down in a motel in Boulder, Colorado and it was Bill Schaufele calling, who was then Assistant Secretary for Africa, saying, “Bob, would you be interested in Ghana?” And oh, boy, would I. I loved Ghana despite all the trauma. So I jumped at that and said, “Yes, go with it.” They put my name forward and we went back to Malta to pack up. We only stayed there another couple of months, I guess, before we left.

*Q: You went back to Malta?*

SMITH: To Malta, that's right, to say good-byes and so forth. So we went on to Ghana. I was very, very glad to get back in Africa. I felt a little bit out of it in Europe, frankly, delightful as it was from a physical standpoint. I went on to Ghana and found that the country had just gone from bad to worse in the intervening years since I had been there. Nothing in the stores; indeed, many of them were boarded up. Only one operating restaurant worthy of the name in the whole city of Accra, which is a very large city. The economy was in a shambles.

By the time I got there, of course, they had been through a number of coups and a General Acheampong was the Head of State and Chairman of the Supreme Military Council, a rather unprepossessing military type who was struggling along. But I had so admired the Ghanaian people, and still do, because they had retained their wit, and charm, and humor despite all the privations piled upon them. They have, in short, been badly served by every government they've had since Nkrumah.

*Q: Is it somehow endemic within this charming people or is it just fate?*

SMITH: I don't know. It's difficult to answer because the Ghanaians, like the Ibos, were among the best educated in Africa, again, a plethora of lawyers, doctors, engineers, even scientists, and so forth, most of whom now are working and living abroad. There may be some dribbling back now, but most of them got out while they could, further running down the economy. Nkrumah quickly went through the British reserves I alluded to earlier.

Under the Acheampong regime, which was a military regime, I was greeted with open arms, literally with open arms, most warmly, our relations with it were very good. But corruption was rampant in the country, as it is in many places in Africa. We had a modest AID and Peace Corps program there. And again, because of the greed and the corruption, there were, not one, but two coups during my three years stay in Ghana leading to still other military regimes, each one no better than the last.

As I say, even the civilian regimes have not been able to repair the damage and really put the country back on its feet. The only hopeful sign I can point to is that the current regime, headed by Jerry Rawlings, seems to have finally gotten its act together, despite his early rhetoric of anti-Americanism, a la Nkrumah. He has reached agreements with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and the Ghanaian Cedi, the currency, is again worth something, I gather. He is making it worthwhile to be a cocoa farmer again. He's making it easier for foreign businessmen to do business there. And in short, this

young ex-flight lieutenant in the Ghanaian Air Force now seems to be doing a much better job than he did at first.

*Q: When you came there what was American policy towards Ghana? We're talking about 1976.*

SMITH: Our relations have traditionally been warm and close. There were a number of Americans living there, in fact. Huge numbers of Ghanaians had immigrated to the United States either legally or illegally. Our policy was to try to help Ghanaians do what they could to get the country back on its feet and make it economically viable through our Peace Corps, and AID programs, and so forth. But again, the needs were so great and our means were so limited there wasn't a great deal we could do.

*Q: What were we doing in AID at that time?*

SMITH: Largely in agricultural development, economic development in general, health, the Peace Corps, in education.

*Q: How do you deal with the problem? You've got an AID project and, obviously, this is, in one way, funneling equipment, or money, or something to a place that is full of corruption. I mean, people must have come up and said, "Look, we can't do this unless we pay off so and so."*

SMITH: Then we didn't do it. Then we just didn't do it. We monitored the AID programs closely to prevent that sort of thing on a virtually daily basis. I have no hesitancy in saying that none of our AID money was siphoned off.

*Q: How effective was it? I mean, if the atmosphere was corrupt, how do you operate in those circumstances?*

SMITH: Well, you operate through non-corrupt officials or you design the projects in such a way so that it doesn't lend itself to that sort of thing. I think most of the money was made

off commercial enterprises, commercial deals, certainly not our AID programs, perhaps with others. Difficult, difficult years, a tragedy.

I think our AID programs were making some impact in the short run. But if I take the long view, if I go back to 1960-1961 and look at what I found in Africa then and look at what I find in Africa today, I have got to be terribly depressed. Our AID program has not really worked that well, in my judgment, in Africa or, indeed, elsewhere in the world. The Ghanaian people are, in fact, worse off today than they were at the time of independence. The same thing is true in many other African states.

*Q: Well, I mean, in the first place, it's obviously the fault of people not getting their act together. But looking at our AID, when you were looking at these programs, were we doing the right thing or the wrong thing?*

SMITH: I thought, at the time, we were doing the right thing. I think, in retrospect—and I don't want to single out the particular projects—unfortunately, they were not self-sustaining to a sufficient extent or self-perpetuating.

*Q: Could you give some examples?*

SMITH: Well, I mean by that, simply that we didn't have enough projects that were sustainable over the long haul after the American technicians departed. Now there are a lot of exceptions to that and there are a lot of projects operating in Africa today, I'm sure, under purely African direction with no American technician in sight. So I don't mean this to be a blanket condemnation, far from it. But I have to say I'm terribly disappointed when I look at the status of African countries and their peoples today from what I anticipated it would be back in 1960 and 1961 because, given their human and natural resources, many of these countries should be much further ahead. So I don't think Western aid programs—I shouldn't even single out the West—aid programs, in general, have not been nearly as effective as they should have been, sad to say.

*Q: Again, maybe there are certain things that aid can't do unless there is the proper infrastructure to support it. I'm talking about the human infrastructure to support it.*

SMITH: Yes, perhaps not. I'm reminded of a conversation I had with Premier Okpara in Eastern Nigeria early on in the '60s, who was also the head of the political party in Eastern Nigeria. I remember him slamming his big fist down on the table once and saying, “Mr. Smith, please, no more feasibility studies. You send people out and they do a study. Then three months later you send another team of Americans out and they do a study of that study, all of which is designed to come up with a feasibility study. You're studying us to death and nothing gets done.” He was ranting and raving, but all in good fun. He was grinning as he was saying this, but there was a barb in it because our AID programs were excruciatingly slow and hemmed in with all sorts of bureaucratic restrictions and caveats. It was a tremendous frustration to African leaders to deal with our AID people.

I don't have the answers. I know now, in 1989, they're looking at the whole AID program again. I think they've reached the same conclusion that I just articulated; that it has not been as effective worldwide as we wanted it to be. I think we bit off more than we could chew in many of these places. You can't undo it. I'm not saying we did any damage, it's just that they were not self-sustaining and viable in the long run, which is very sad.

*Q: Were we concerned with Ghana as being an African leader? Or by the time you got there, had Ghana's role become less important?*

SMITH: Ghana, until recent years, certainly through the Nkrumah years, always had a leadership role in Africa quite disproportionate to its relatively small size. You have to give Nkrumah credit for that because they led the way to independence. They were the first independent black Africans, other than Liberia and Ethiopia. So they did have a major leadership role. Therefore, we paid a great deal of attention to it even while I was there because their voice in the councils of the OAU, Organization of African Unity, and others

was quite loud and often strident while Nkrumah was in power. So yes, they very definitely had a leadership role and we took cognizance of that.

Also, they had been blessed with an excellent foreign service and civil service all these years who had managed to hang on and survive these various regimes that were doing them such damage. And they've got tremendous human resources. If we could get all the Ghanaians living abroad, especially in England and the States, to go back and put their talents to use, they could turn it around in a hurry. But you're going to have to have the right government in power to make that happen.

*Q: Speaking of governments and power, when you were there you said there were several coups. Could you describe what happened, and what you saw and did, and what the embassy did?*

SMITH: Strangely enough, and this is a source of great amusement with some of my colleagues, I happened to be in the States, either on medical leave or consultations, when both those coups happened. I got back on the first commercial flight but I was not physically there for the coup. It had very little impact on the embassy or the American population. This was an internal squabble among the military in the case of Ghana, and having to do with corrupt practices and not sharing the wealth with the right people. Each new man pledges to correct these wrongs and it doesn't happen. Liberia was a very different case. We should get to that in a moment, I think.

*Q: Were there any particular problems that you had in Ghana that come to mind?*

SMITH: No. No. It was a most enjoyable tour of duty except for the privations being suffered by the Ghanaian people themselves. And, indeed, because of our insistence that Peace Corps volunteers live as their indigenous counterparts live, we had real food problems, almost amounting to malnutrition, among some of our Peace Corps volunteers. We had to start shipping sardines and other canned goods up country to some of our

Peace Corps volunteers just to keep body and soul together. Things were that bad in Ghana and that was a source of great concern.

But politically, no. Ghana, during my tenure there, was behaving itself on the international scene and they didn't have the voice in international councils that they once had. We had very friendly relations. It was just the frustration of being unable to cut through the graft and corruption internally. Not that we were affected by it, but it just prevented a lot from getting done. It prevented American firms from coming in and investing there. The economy just kept going downhill while I was there.

*Q: Were you getting any pressure? While you were there the Ford Administration went out and the Carter one came in with a new emphasis on human rights and all that. Did this cause you any turnaround or reactivate you on things?*

SMITH: No turnaround, certainly. I welcomed this new thrust and it gave me a lot of additional ammunition to use in various conversations with the head of state, with the foreign minister, and other cabinet ministers who would give me a very polite, even cordial, hearings and make all the right noises, but very little real change.

*Q: What sort of things were we concerned about in the field of human rights?*

SMITH: In Ghana there were some political prisoners and that sort of thing. I can't remember many others. Most of that came in the years in Liberia, as a matter of fact. Why don't we go on to Liberia?

*Q: All right. Why don't we go on to Liberia. In a way, it's rather remarkable in this day and age, where ambassadorial assignments are getting scarcer and scarcer as far as professional officers, that you had three. So many people have had distinguished careers and they are tossed a year and a half in Rwanda or something like that to end off their career and they're supposed to depart the scene as quietly as possible. And this was your third ambassadorial assignment.*

SMITH: Yes. I was very fortunate, indeed, and I think it was just the question of, quite literally, being in the right place at the right time. First of all, let me back up to Ghana just a minute. I forgot one major thing. I followed Shirley Temple Black but there was about a six-month interregnum. We pulled Mrs. Black out in anger when the Ghanaians, to show their displeasure over some American policy—I forget now what it was—at the last minute would not let Secretary Kissinger land in Ghana. So my marching orders in Ghana were to go back in there and patch things up, which didn't take long because the Ghanaians were already predisposed to resume friendly and close relations.

*Q: How effective had Mrs. Black been?*

SMITH: Quite effective. She's not the dilettante that some, at least, would have you think she is. She was popular, very popular not only among the Ghanaians, but among our own embassy staff. And the fine DCM I inherited from Shirley was very high on her. There are obvious limitations on any political appointee who knows little or nothing about the foreign service. But Shirley was very, very bright, and dedicated, and sincere. She had had experience at the UN Even if she didn't, I'd have to give her very high marks. As a matter of fact, because she then came out of Ghana and was made chief of protocol, she swore me in when I went out there.

To go back to Liberia, the shift over there was simply “good luck,” because Bev Carter had left some time before.

*Q: He had been ambassador?*

SMITH: Yes, he had been ambassador in Monrovia. And Liberia, like Ghana, is a class two mission, or was a class two mission. I don't know whether you even use the phrase anymore. And the Department and AF, the African Bureau, felt very strongly they did not want a rookie ambassador in Liberia, but rather someone who had had African

ambassadorial experience. My number was just coming up. I was then about two and a half years into my Ghana tour, so it worked out most fortuitously.

We went on to Liberia very happily. Very different from Ghana. To be blunt about it, I never found the Liberians, with all their American ties, nearly as charming as the Ghanaians or, indeed, the Ibos. This isn't to say I disliked the country or the people.

*Q: Well, it has that reputation. It seems like it always has been the exception or the side show and something that is basically overlooked when you think about Africa.*

SMITH: Yes. Of course, they were the exception to the rule, too, in that they had been independent for so long. They are widely regarded by other Africans as kind of an appendage to the United States or, indeed, a colony of the United States. That may be a bum rap but there's enough of a grain of truth in it to make one uncomfortable at times, particularly when I arrived there and found the Monrovia Police Department dressed in uniforms that could only have been hand-me-downs from the Los Angeles Police Department, the black shirt and trousers, caps, and so forth. All the armed forces uniforms were also our own secondhand stuff.

But I was greeted very warmly by a very distinguished African leader, President Tolbert, and we got along famously. I had a few squabbles with the foreign minister, Cecil Dennis, largely on human rights issues, and so forth, because, while a democratic nation, they also ruled with a pretty heavy hand. The indigenous people up country did not fare too well under this, what we called, Americo-Liberian regime—the descendants of American slaves that went back to Liberia to found the country. But the relationship, basically, was one of warmth and cordiality. The president went out of his way to be personally cordial to me, even taking me up with him on a week-long jaunt through the provinces in Northern Liberia as his honored guest, riding with him every step of the way in his limousine.

*Q: What were our interests there?*

SMITH: Many. We had certain rights that remain in the classified area concerning the use of Roberts Field, the international airfield there. We have our largest communications set up anywhere in Africa at the embassy in Monrovia, large numbers of communications technicians, and other interests, as well, strategic and otherwise. And, of course, a long, long history of ties to the United States. Many Liberians did, in fact, consider themselves sort of the 51st state, like it or not. And because of corruption that was rampant there, that often was downright embarrassing at times.

But President Tolbert was very nice. At the same time, we would have to fuss at the foreign minister or the president several times about human rights violations, imprisoning people and then keeping them without charge, that sort of thing. But the main problem was that the Americo-Liberian clique, and they were a small minority in the country, in fact, ruled the country. They controlled the court system, the police, the armed forces, the parliament, everything about life in Liberia.

And, again, inevitably perhaps after my experience in Ghana, I had come back to the States on a medical evacuation and was an outpatient at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, when I got the inevitable call at one o'clock in the morning from the desk officer in Washington saying, “Mr. Ambassador, the Secretary would like you back in Liberia like yesterday. There's been a coup.” And we did not anticipate that coup. I would like to be able to say we saw it coming. We did not. We knew there was great unhappiness.

In this case, in April of 1980, a group of enlisted men in the armed forces were down on the beach near the presidential palace drinking beer and they had their weapons with them. One thing led to another and, to make a long story short, they got a group together and went into the presidential palace and murdered President Tolbert. They tracked down virtually the entire cabinet, senior parliamentary leaders, and other prominent Americo-Liberians, and it was a blood bath.

I got back in the next day on the first flight in. The young man who had taken over the country was a 29-year old master sergeant named Sammy Doe. He was semi-literate, could barely read and write his own name. Could, in fact, barely speak proper English. I literally, at times, would resort to pidgin English to communicate with Sergeant Doe after he became head of state. It was a real body blow, not because we had anything against the indigenous peoples of Liberia, and we knew the faults of the old regime, but at the same time, the blood bath that followed was inexcusable.

There were a few frantic days, and they were frantic because this unleashed this latent hatred which was there on the part of the enlisted men in the armed forces, and the first order Doe gave was that you no longer have to obey the orders of your officers either in the police force or in the army. You can imagine the kind of chaos that resulted from that. So they were stopping people on the street, dragging people from their beds and murdering them. In the case of the cabinet, tying them to stakes on the beach and executing them by firing squad.

This, despite the fact that in the morning I had again gone to see Sergeant Doe and given him a personal appeal from President Carter to spare their lives. He heard me but made no commitment. That afternoon my public affairs officer burst into my office and said, “Mr. Ambassador, my God, they have done it. They've shot all of them. They've killed all of them, eight or nine lined up on the beach tied to a stake.” So it was a bloody mess.

Worse yet, we had the obvious concern about these ignorant, poorly educated, almost illiterate enlisted men being gotten to by the other side and being turned around and having Liberia wind up as a communist state.

*Q: Who were the other side?*

SMITH: Well, the Soviets were there and very interested in all this, although they were completely nonplused by the coup. But they immediately saw an opportunity here and

tried to move in on it. And I must say, I think one of the major things that saved us there was not, certainly, the charm or good looks of the American ambassador, but rather the presence of a U.S. military mission that had been there for decades, headed, in my tenure, by a tough, charming Texas full colonel in the Army named Bob Gosney who was the head of the U.S. Military Mission and who, in that capacity, had helped train Master Sergeant Doe. Master Sergeant Doe adored Colonel Gosney, and called him “Chief.” He referred to him always in the third person as “the Chief.”

I very quickly became cognizant of this and I started taking Colonel Gosney with me when I went to see Sammy Doe. This helped enormously because he respected and had total confidence in Colonel Gosney. He knew little and cared less about communism and the Soviet Union. There was nothing ideological. This was a genuine tribal upheaval to get rid of the hated upper classes and to bring more privileges to the underprivileged. So Sammy Doe was not then and is not now a politically ideological person. But I can't emphasize strongly enough how helpful it was to have this small group of American Army officers, consisting of a group of lieutenant colonels and majors who had, instead of lording it over the enlisted men of the armed forces as their Liberian counterparts did, the Americans, being Americans, would learn these fellows names, including Sergeant Doe, and so forth, and they were warm and cordial to their underlings. And, as a result, Sergeant Doe quickly passed the word that whatever the chief says, goes.

So I had the members of my military mission out in their vehicles literally patrolling the streets. And when they would see a drunken or doped up Liberian soldier holding a group of civilians at gunpoint or something, trying to rob them, or rape them or whatever, one word from one of my American officers would stop that dead in its tracks. They would stop, salute, and say, “Yes, sir,” and go on about their business. It saved lives, literally saved lives, this personal relationship that they had established. And that really sustained us for a very lengthy period before their government got formed and Sammy Doe came up with a foreign minister who was bright and well educated that we could deal with.

The problem was that Sammy Doe and his immediate cohorts, to me, were, of course, in a very personal sense, murderers. They had murdered William Tolbert, who was a very dear friend of mine, and the other members of the cabinet with whom I had been very close. And yet, here they were, the new government. It was clearly not in our national interest to see the country go down the tubes, so it fell to me to do what we could to sustain this young man in steering along a certain course, which we managed to do with great difficulty.

But that led to a situation in which he came to lean on me and the embassy almost too much. He would summon me at all hours of the night to say, “Mr. Ambassador, we have a problem.” He would state the problem and wait for me to come up with a solution. So at times it came very uncomfortably close to running a country that you really don't want any part of, and always putting out fires and fears that he had. He had a fear that Houphou#t-Boigny, President of the Ivory Coast, whose daughter was married to Tolbert's son, with the help of French troops was going to invade Liberia.

So it was a question of hanging in there and doing what we could to moderate the behavior of Sergeant Doe and his government. And I think we were relatively successful, as was my successor, Bill Swing, who had a long tenure there, about five years, pumping in a great deal of American aid, especially to the military, since the unhappiness of the military with their lot in life was one of the main causes of the coup.

It was an exciting time. The Secretary ordered me to evacuate American dependents. We had to get them out of the country right after the coup when the troops were running wild. So it was, perhaps, the most exciting time in my Foreign Service career, but not the most satisfying.

*Q: Were you under any other pressures? You found the situation repugnant to you, I mean, dealing with people whom you had to deal with, but there had been Pulitzer Prize winning photographs of these leaders being executed and all this, there must have been a*

*lot of pressure from Congress, and from the news press, and all that. Did this translate to you at all?*

SMITH: Yes. We felt we were really operating in a goldfish bowl or under a microscope, I should say. Human rights pressure inevitably came into this picture after the coup. But strangely enough, not a great deal of congressional pressure. Everyone was sickened, of course, by what happened out there. But you can't reverse that and I think everyone saw that what we had to concentrate on was where do we go from there. And I had to keep reminding people of some of the things that the previous government had done and why the depths of anger being felt by these people was quite genuine.

*Q: Were you getting any pressure from the black caucus one way or another?*

SMITH: I had a number of visits out there. Congressman Bill Gray came out, Julian Dixon, those two members. I had Andy Young, then at the UN, come out a couple of times before the coup. He also visited me in Ghana a couple times. But not undue congressional pressure. I had more congressional pressure in South Africa than anyplace else, in particular from Charlie Diggs. He did not like our policy in South Africa. Indeed, he would not have been happy unless we had broken relations, I think.

But I've talked long enough. It's been a fascinating and very satisfying career. I retired in January of 1981, sort of in the middle of all this, but I felt, for a number of reasons, that I had to. One, the Department offered a monetary incentive to do that. Secondly, I developed a medical problem which was beginning to worry me. After a couple of times when I stumbled going up the steps to the presidential mansion I realized, hey, I've really got to do something about this. These trips back to Mayo didn't get to the bottom of it. My right leg was deteriorating. To make a long story short, only after I retired and got back here and started running the African Wildlife Foundation did they discover that I, in fact, have multiple sclerosis. So it's just as well I retired when I did because I just didn't have the stamina.

*Q: And strain is a major factor.*

SMITH: Stress, as the doctor says, is contraindicated for MS patients. And in those last two posts, particularly Liberia, I had more than my share.

*Q: In these interviews we try to ask two questions. One, what do you consider your greatest achievement or what did you do that gave you the greatest satisfaction?*

SMITH: I would have to say, I guess, in my last post, keeping Liberia, quite literally, from going down the tubes. I know countries don't go bankrupt but Liberia came about as close as any country could, I think. We had to resort to some pretty imaginative policy initiatives to keep that from happening in Liberia. To keep Liberia from going down the tubes and basically, to retain the feeling that Liberians continue to have toward the United States despite all that happened out there. I think to keep that ship on a steady keel was perhaps the greatest achievement.

*Q: And lastly, if a young person came to you today, how do you feel about the Foreign Service as a career as you see it today? Would you recommend it?*

SMITH: There's nothing wrong with the tape, I'm having to think about that long and hard. I say that for a number of reasons. Our number two son, Steve, and his wife, Jacqueline, are Foreign Service officers serving in Sri Lanka right now, at the embassy in Colombo. They're coming back here in June. The other three of our children didn't show any interest in it.

The foreign service, I think, has changed a great deal since I left. Let me put it this way: While I would still recommend the foreign service as a career to a particular kind of youngster, I, perhaps, would not do so with the same enthusiasm that I would have 20 years ago. I think the service has changed, not for the better, but for the worse.

And while I think I am a feminist and a strong supporter of women's rights, I think some changes in that area, too, have been unfortunate in that my wife never worked “outside the home” throughout our foreign service career, but I could literally not have survived any of my posts without her. We always considered ourselves a team in a real sense of that word at all of our posts. And I'm afraid, from what I hear from my younger colleagues, that's no longer the case. Something has happened that I can't quite put my finger on that makes me uncomfortable.

And, also, I liked the sense that you and I had when we went in the Service that this is it, this is our career. The kids today, apparently, aren't going into the service with that feeling. And moreover, I'm told, they are being told not to go into the service with that attitude because it probably won't happen that way and that you should consider the Foreign Service another interlude in your life and you'll be lucky if you get 20 years out of it. I don't think that can stimulate the kind of loyalty, and support, and devotion that, with all due modesty, I think you and I reflected during our career.

*Q: I understand exactly what you're saying.*

SMITH: I find that pretty sad.

*Q: Well, I want to thank you very much.*

End of interview